THE RICHIBUCTO BURIAL SITE (CeDf18), NEW BRUNSWICK

- Research in 1981

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INTRODUCTION

The Richibucto Burial Site (Fig.1) has been recognized for at least eighty years. Over this time it has been both eroded and plundered. In 1979, during an assessment of coastal erosion in Kouchibouguac National Park (Davis and Christianson 1981) recent signs of "potting" at the site indicated something should be done to rescue or to protect the site. In this regard, New Brunswick Department of Historical and Cultural Resources and Parks Canada investigated the site in the fall of 1979 using a metal detector (Finlay 1979). Enough material was found to suggest parts of the site were still undisturbed. During the 1981 field season, the aim was to physically test the site to verify the nature and extent of the cemetery and to outline a course of action for the future of the site.

The cemetary is located on Northwest Branch of Richibucto Harbour at the very southern end of Kouchibouguac National Park. It is about 1 km north of Richibucto Village, Kent Co. The site parallels shore on a low bank, straddling the National Park and a narrow strip of land owned by the Province of New Brunswick but leased to the disterillery for their effluent pipeline.

The research was sponsored by Parks Canada and by Department of Historical and Cultural Resources. The field party was lead by Pat Allen, assisted by Albert Ferguson, Ellen Foulkes, and Joan Peterson. As well, Kouchibouguac National Park supplied one person, Harold Sock. The excavations were undertaken during the first two weeks of September.

HISTORY OF THE SITE

Apart from the obvious recent nature of some graves found during field research, the site has been recognized as a burial ground in the literature for 80 years. "Another possible Indian locality was just within the mouth of the Aldouane on the north side where an old burial ground is known, though probably this was French (Ganong 1906:8)". It was noted in 1950 that a tradition of the Big Cove Micmac suggested that this area had been the site of a battle with the Mohawks, the skeleton from which were washing out of the bank (Stoddard 1950:152). In the late 1960s, skeletons were found when the sewage disposal lagoon and pipeline were built from a distillery located on the south side of the Northwest Branch. Since then, especially as noted in 1979 and by way of local stories, more skeletons have been exposed by wave action and by pot hunters. Certainly a large portion of the cemetery has been lost to both these agencies. The basic questions to be answered from this present reseach are how much of the cemetery remains and what should happen to the site in the future.

METHODOLOGY

The research conducted was to ascertain the size and nature of the site. To do this two weeks were spent in the field with a crew of five people excavating narrow trenches. Given the finds from the previous metal detector survey, the main area of

the cemetery should be on the eastern side of the sewage pipeline. It was decided to test the site by excavating long narrow (0.5 m wide) trenches parallel to the bank to locate the physical remains of the burials, i.e. the burial pits (Fig. 2). In total 10 trenches were excavated in three rows: one 5 m from the bank; another, 15 m and the last, 20 m. This technique proved very successful at finding the soil stains of what are assumed to be of burial pits and, in some cases, the actual burials. A good picture of what this site is can be drawn from the testing.

THE SITE: SIZE AND NATURE OF THE DEPOSITS

The aim of the testing was quickly achieved; burials were located. These were marked by a copper pot in one case, by cranial fragments, and by soil stains. The first trenches excavated were deep, on the average of 1 m. Human remains were encountered, frequently enough to equate a brown soil stain in the orange-brown sand matrix of the site with the grave excavations. Once this association was made, the trenches were dug just deep enough to locate the soil stain.

In all 17 soil stains were found, four with actual confirmation of human remains in the pit. Since it was not in the research plan, no burials were excavated; the remains were covered up intact. The limits of the site can be defined from the

trenching. It extends for about 70 m north along the bank from the sewage lagoon. The site is only about 25 m wide. No signs of remains will likely appear on the other side of the pipeline as there is a large disturbance which grades quickly into swamp. The site, then, presently covers an area of 1750 m.

The most unusual feature of the site is the nature of the graves. It was expected to find "copper kettle" burials, the most common description from local stories about the graves. Indeed, one was located with the upright pot covered over with birch bark. Another grave had a massive reading on a metal detector suggestive of another kettle burial. Review of the literature suggests that these graves should have the typically flexed burial positions of prehistoric graves. The other signs of human remains encountered, however, were extended; one with signs of what may be coffin nails. With these extended burials, no signs of buried goods were found. The cemetery obviously was used over a number of years with the latest graves being Christian or European in practise. This puts another facet on the question of what should happen to the site, and may even being into question of who was buried in the site. Unfortunately, the later use of the burial ground cannot be dated by archaeology. Perhaps a search of the historic record might indicate how recent these Christian/European style interments are.

EARLY HISTORIC BURIALS - DISCUSSION

The distribution of the known early historic period graves in this region is very uneven in space and time (See Appendix A). In ethnic terms, nearly all burial sites are from Micmac territory. Only one is from Maliseet area (Portland Point); the Maine sites are likely Penobscot. It is also interesting to note how many of the sites are near the heads of tide (Portland Point, Restigouche, Red Bank) or in tidal lagoons (Pictou, Tracadie, Tabusintac). From the available information from this review of literature, it would seem the highest density is buried inclusions are amongst the Micmac.

The dating of the historic burials in this region is not very clear. The only two dateable sites are Pemaquid and Portland Point, both based on site stratigraphy and both outside Micmac territory. The Pemaquid remains are earlier than 1610 where as the latter is post 1645 but pre 1762. Another Indian (Maliseet) cemetery has been excavated (Wintemberg 1933) which has not been discussed because, like the late component at Richibucto, it is indicative of Christian burial practices. Ste. Annes Point, in Fredericton, N.B., likely dates to the 18th century, perhaps as early as the 1730s or earlier (Theriault 1982). Ste. Annes Point, although recent works suggests it was a Roman Catholic burial ground containing both European and Native remains, suggests that perhaps some Indian populations had relinguished their "traditional" burial

practices for the newer ones, at least, by the early 18th century. Denys (1908) in the late 17th century mentions discouraging the Micmacs from being so wasteful of both furs and European goods in burial ceremonies. Presumably economic pressures, along with constant missionary presence had its effect by the late 17th or early 18th century.

The beginnings of the complex is even more difficult to define. No really late prehistoric burials are known for the Maine/Maritime region; that is, it is not known what were the common practices that developed into the early historic patterns. One site on Hog Island, P.E.I., may date as late as 1000 A.D., but it has not been excavated or described; it did contain burial goods, however. Another burial on the coast of Maine (Fernald Point, Hancock Co.) contained only one harpoon head as a probable burial good; its date is ca. 1100 A.D. (855± 60 B.P., SI - 3423) (Sanger 1980:18).

Certainly historic records indicate the general period of the inception of historic period burial practice; i.e. when Europeans first began regular visits to Eastern North American in the sixteenth century. The Pemaquid burials suggest that the placement of European goods in graves was well established by the early part of the 17th century. In some respects the sixteenth century should be labelled the 'lost century' in the Maine/Maritime region. There is ample evidence of European

presence in the region for fishing, whaling, and trading. Since there was no competition for land during this early period, the Europeans and native people must have met on relatively equal footing, i.e. as mutual trading partners. There is evidence of the massive influence of this newly formed trading relationship throughout the Northeast, even before Europeans themselves undertake major explorations. The comment by Champlain about the Massachusetts Indians that they already had iron axes traded from the Maritimes (quoted in Hadlock 1947) is most indicative. Along the same lines the early disappearance of the St. Lawrence Iroquois, unrecorded by history, may be related to power struggles over the St. Lawrence River trade route, since it should be funnelling many of the goods from the Atlantic region into the interior of the continent.

The distribution of European grave goods is very widespread throughout the Northeast. Numerous examples are known from New England (Gibson 1980, Simmons 1970), and New York (Ritchie 1980:321-322) for example. It is beyond the scope of the present paper to synthesize this material; it is known, however, that burial ritual itself seems not to be the basis of the widespread similarity of pattern but rather it is a reflection of activity in other parts of the society, i.e. in 'economic' trade - furs for new kinds of goods. The importance of this trading activity is reflected in society and shows up

in the burial ritual. Rather than being a religious 'cult' the historic burial complex is an effect of trade. Each group would seem to be involving itself in the highly desirable trade. The form that the burials take are a product of each ethnic group's ordering of their society; Iroquios place Europeans goods in ossuaries; Micmac place them with flexed burials.

To relate this to Richibucto site, the early component could be as early as the 16th century or as late as the early 18th century. The later "Christian" component is likely dated to mid 18th century and later.

THE FUTURE

The future of the site is continguent upon the two sources of disturbance - erosion and lotting.

Can the site be protected from erosion?

Unlike sites in other situations, it will be exceedingly difficult to protect this site from continued erosion. The basic problem is that the Maritime landmass is sinking, creating the steady loss of shoreline. In other words, the basic cause of site loss is irreversible. In one case New Brunswick Historical & Cultural Resources has erected a sea

wall in front of an archaeological site to halt erosion (Ferguson and Turnbull 1980). Whereas this wall was tied into bedrock, the Richibucto Burial site's sand banks would simply continue to erode on either side of any wall. The cost would also prove to be prohibitively expensive, considering that much of the site has already been destroyed and no protection can be offered from continued looting.

Can the site be protected from looting?

Obviously nothing has protected the site up til now. Even the creation of a well used national park has not hindered looters of this site, nor will it discourage them in the future. The site is on the extreme end of the Park away from well patrolled areas. The continual erosion will expose material which will be an incentive to dig more until the site is totally gone. Since this site has yielded material in the past it is widely known. This report, itself, may induce more site destruction. Even if a sea wall were erected, looting could continue making the effort a total waste of resources. Since the site is not in a well used area of the park it is impossible to successfully monitor the area. The simple answer to the question is that there is no effective method of site protection.

RECOMMENDATION

Given these as parameters of the site's future - continued loss from the sea and by man - one clear option would be to move the remaining contents to a more secure location by means of a properly conducted archaeological excavation. This would guarantee the site's survival while adding something to our knowledge of a little known period of our Maritime heritage.

However, before any work of this nature is undertaken, it is manditory to obtain the fullest possible co-operation from the descendants of those who were buried at the site. Since the whole issue of archaeology and Indian cemetaries is a justifiably sensitive one amongst New Brunswick's Indian community, the future of the site must, for the most part, be determined by those concerned. If the site is to be preserved, it must be done with close co-operation and consultation.

APPENDIX A

EARLY HISTORIC PERIOD BURIALS IN THE MAINE/MARITIMES

To better understand the Richibucto site, the literature of the Maritimes and adjacent areas has been reviewed for the occurence, nature, and dating of similar sites. The record is very sketchy at best as only two sites have been excavated properly. The published quantity of sites is probably not a good reflection of their actual frequency. Most sites have been found by accident in gravel pits, in bank erosion, or in archaeological excavations. The standard of reporting is quite variable; there has been no reassessment of the older collections to arrive at a date for interred goods. There has been little study of the physical remains; studies of age, sex or pathologies area rare. Most descriptions are offered years after the sites were found; some remain unpublished. Given these difficulties, we can, at least, plot the occurence and general natures of this early historic burial complex. No term has been coined to express the similarities of these sites other than "copper kettle" burials; for sake of convenience this label shall be used.

Tabusintac, N.B. - Smith 1886, Kain & Rowe 1901

Location: This site was found in 1879 by John Campbell and was reported by Dr. A. C. Smith in 1886. The site is located near where the Tabusintac River meets the lagoon; it is on the inside of Indian Point facing away from the Lagoon. The grave was found washing out of the bank.

Contents: A series of copper pots were uncovered, piled upside-down. The human remains were found beneath the lower "boilers". The grave consisted of three copper kettle, one 18" diameter at the mouth by 11" deep; the other two about twice the size. No other objects were mentioned in the article, although three tanged iron knives are noted as coming from Tabusintac in a later article (Kain & Row 1901: 312).

Tracadie, N.B. (Wilson's Point) - Kain & Rowe 1901

Location: The location of this site (or sites) is confusing as published. Kain and Rowe (1901) are confused about the findings of Dr. A. C. Smith as Wilson's Point, Shippagan, is specifically mentioned in one part of the article; Tracadie is mentioned later. There is no clear treatment of what comes from where. Furthermore, the site - Wilson's Point - is confused with Pecten Point on Lameque Island, the supposed site of Deny's fort (Ganong 1899). Wilson's Point is actually on Miscou Island. Local informants tie the site to the Tracadie area. Here the site is located on the Tracadie River closer to the head of tide than to the lagoon.

Contents: There is a most interesting description of the site wherever it is located. "Four circular depressions in the ground, about 100 feet from the shore, ..." were noted. "A copper kettle was found in one hole. In the kettle they found the skull, arm bones and ribs, but the bones of the lower extremities were found outside of the pot. Over the mouth of the vessel was the skin of some animal and over the skin, birch bark. I saw the circular skin covering, but it was too sodden to bring away. In the other holes were found pots, axes, a sword, knives, a harpoon and a pair of bracelets.

In the small pot were some beads." (Kain and Rowe 1901: 306). Further studies by Dr. Smith indicated human remains were found in two of the other circular depressions. Associated with the bracelets was a button with the "...face of a man on it, surrounded by a halo and cross at the side of it." (Kain and Rowe 1901:307). Another grave was found in this area, "... the occupant had been buried in a sitting posture." (1901:307). There were no associations mentioned with this grave.

Red Bank, N.B. - Hadlock 1947, Harper 1956a

Location: In 1927, Mr. Peter Hogan, a resident of Sunny Corner, found a single grave in a gravel pit in the edge of the terrace. This location is just up the Northwest Miramichi from the Hogan-Mullin site excavated by W. Wintemberg in 1930; the site is on the lower terrace, the burial being on the next higher terrace. This is near the head of tide on the Northwest.

Contents: The only description of this grave was published in 1947 (Hadlock 1947:49-62). The list of objects associated is not necessarily complete. The grave consisted of various parts of human skeletons,

fragments of a brass tub, birch bark, tanned skins of moose and beaver, several sections of woven mats, a small piece of folded leather, and two pouches or armbands of birch bark covered with tanned leather (Harper 1956a:47). In 1947 only a few pieces of moose and beaver skins, and a few sections of the matting remained. As a part of Archaeology Branch's research in the area in the mid 1970s, another section of the cedar park matting was found, being kept by the son of Peter Hogan in their barn.

Portland Point, N.B.- Harper 1956a, 1956b

Location: These two graves are from an actual excavation, that conducted by the New Brunswick Museum in 1955 and 1956 under the direction of Russel Harper on the site of Fort St. Marie, the Charles laTour establishment in Saint John Harbour, dated from 1630 to 1645. The graves were located within two feet of the French palisade in a stratigraphic position indicative of a post-LaTour occupation. There was signs of Indian settlement on top of the fort deposits. Both burial pits were dug into French strata. This places the graves in the period 1645-1762.

Grave 1. The burial pit was located 2 feet below the present surface; it was about 2 feet by 4 feet in size. Stratigraphically it was covered by a 2 inch layer of crushed shale. A black humus stratum, 6 inches thick, beneath this contained the actual burial. There were two concentrations of fragmentary human bones. The westerly one included the cranium of an adult. At the easterly side of the grave were two bundles of long bones, one of which was wrapped in cloth and birch bark. It was obviously a secondary burial. The associated graves goods, while not including copper pots, consisted of one string of beads with 3 glass and 23 shell, another string with 18 glass beads, copper chain, copper wire, a musket shot mould, a gun flint, scissors, a wooden handle iron knife, an iron spoon (caulker), a iron dagger with traces of a wooden grip, an elaborately carved stone pipe (probably French) and a native stone pipe with a copper lined bowl, fragments of European cloth, 3 possible Indian abrasive stones, and netting fragments.

Grave 2. Information pertaining to this burial is found in the unpublished 1956 field season report. This grave is 1.5 feet below surface. The pit was dug 6 inches into the French layer. The remains of a

single individual was identified; a "teen-age girl ... was lying with head to north-west, arms extended along the sides, and the lower legs folded under the knees." (Harper 1956: 17). The grave goods consisted of an iron bar (a strike-a-light), about 2000 white, light and dark blue glass beads, and two crude arrow-heads, one on each side of the body.

Old Mission Point, N.B. - Turnbull 1972

Location: The grave was found in 1971 during gravel operations; the remains of one large burial pit was uncovered. The site is located on the Restigouche River on the terrace edge over looking the head of tide. The site contains a range of prehistoric and historic materials. The site was apparently the home of the Restigouche Micmac before the 1750s; there is certainly some evidence for use of the site in the mid and late 17th century.

Contents: One large burial pit - about 3 m wide by 800 mm deep, was resting place for multiple burials. Only a portion of one remained in gravel pit, however; the articulated lower body in a flexed position. The grave was found by a front end loader. Amongst

the artifacts were copper tube beads, shell disc beads, organic (hide) material, an iron axe, a bone toggling harpoon head (with an end blade slot) and 2 rectangular pieces of bone, decorated with gouged holes. No function can be assigned to these.

Pictou, N.S. - Harper 1956a

Location: This site was dug up by Mr. K.B. Hopps in 1955. It is "... located 25' above high water mark and back 300' from the edge of Pictou Harbour on the upper gentle slope of a southerly bank. It is 3.25 miles from the open waters of Northumberland Strait." (Harper 1956a: 40).

Contents: This grave has two parts; two circular areas dug to 3 feet below the surface. One part is 6 feet in diameter. One part was carefully prepared, where as the other was irregularily shaped. The carefully prepared area was first covered with a layer of branches and twigs. A layer of birch bark was placed over this, followed by five layers of pelts. The burials, themselves, were placed under overturned copper kettles. Birch bark was placed over this and stones placed over this again. The other part was not lined and the kettles were crushed or "killed". There was a layer of matting

under the kettles. Both birch bark and matting covered the kettles. Stones were also used in this area. The artifacts included with this grave are extensive and consist of:

- 9 kettles
- 5 axes
- 225 iron spear points
- 91 iron awls
- 10 spoons or caulkers
- 1 spear/arrow point (double barbed)
- 5 fish hooks
- 1 iron blade with wooden handle
- 4 table knives - riveted handles
- 5 table knives - riveted handled
- fragments of European cloth
- 7 glass beads
- 1 red pottery beaker
- 1 bow
- fragments of bullrush mats
- 1 leather bundle

MAINE

Sargentville, Me - Moorehead 1922:148-149

Location: This site was excavated in 1912 by Moorehead and is located on a sandy knoll near Sargentville about 20 m from the shore of Walker Pond, Hancock, Co.

Contents: The remains of a single individual were found in a very fragmentary shape. The body was extended with head to the south. The body was accompanied by some grave goods including three copper tube beads strung on a throng near the neck and a rectangular copper plaque lay on the chest underneath which was a sheet of hide. Under the hide was a layer of white and black shell beads. These lay on another piece of hide. Bark or matting pieces were also found in these areas. Fragments of another copper object was found under this.

Pemaquid, Me - Camp 1975

Location: The site is located on "historic" Pemaquid, Lincoln Co., Me. There were two historic Indian graves found outside remains of a 17th century tavern. One grave was dated by a sample of leather (1630± 90 B.P.). The author suggests the graves probably related to a period before the European occupation of the site, i.e. sometime before 1610 (Churchhill 1975:IX).

Grave 1. One grave was very deteriorated; no mention is made of grave goods.

Grave 2. The burial of a human under 45 is accompanied by a newborn infant. The women was lying on her back in a slightly flexed position. The child was placed on her right shoulder. A "pillow of dark earth" was found under the woman's head with a brass plate on top. Another plate on top extended from the shoulder to the groin. There may have been a fibre covering over this. Five brass tubes were found on the top plate. Underneath the skeleton was a sheet of leather. The whole body rested on bark. Associated with the grave was deer skin and possibly a piece of spruce bark.

OTHER MAINE SITES

Two other sites are mentioned in Camp's Pemaquid report; one from a shell heap at Robinson's Cove (about 2 miles from Pemaquid); the other from Tapan's Island near Damariscotta Mills. Both reportedly contained skeletons with sheets of metal covering the body (Camp 19075:76).

FIGURE 1: Location of CeDf18, Kouchibouguac National Park

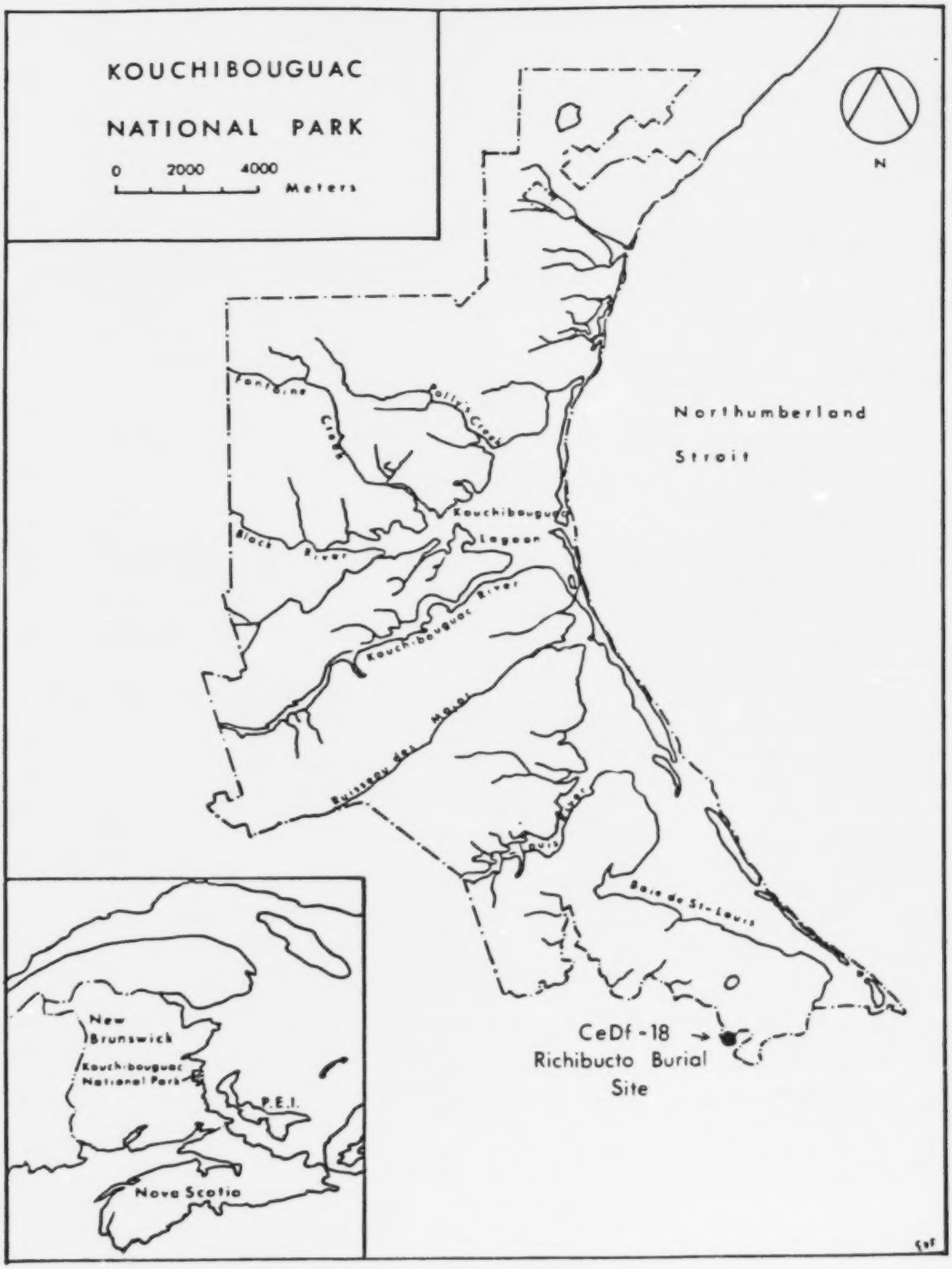
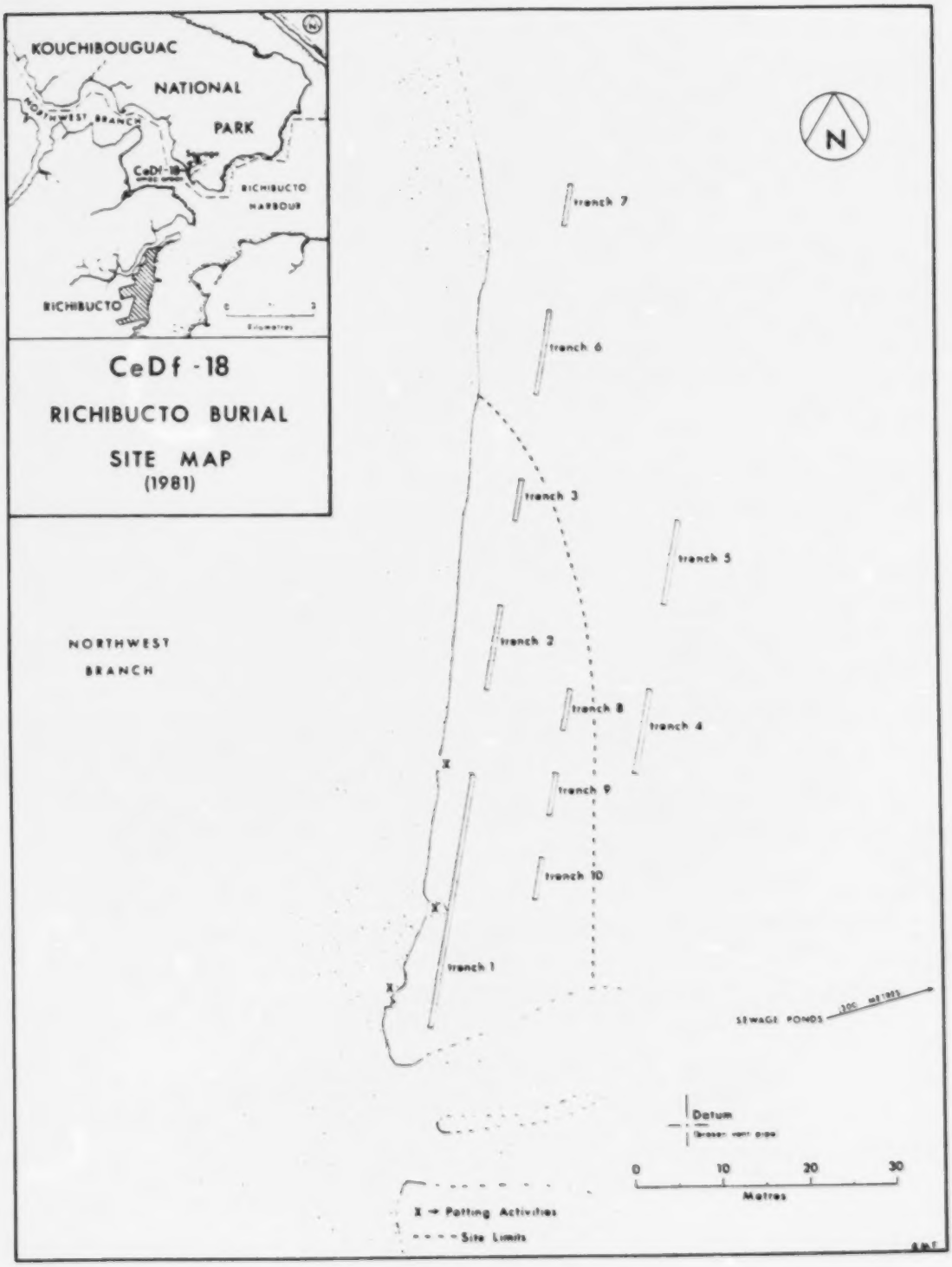

KOUCHIBOUGUAC
NATIONAL PARK
0 2000 4000
Meters
N
Northumberland
Strait
Fontaine
Creek
Gillis Creek
Kouchibouguac
Lagoon
Black River
Kouchibouguac River
Kouchibouguac Head
Bois de St-Louis
CeDf-18
Richibucto Burial
Site
New
Brunswick
Kouchibouguac
National Park
P.E.I.
Nova Scotia

FIGURE 2: General Site Map CeDf18


KOUCHIBOUGUAC
NATIONAL
PARK
NORTHWEST BRANCH
CeDf-18
RICHIBUCTO
HARBOUR
RICHIBUCTO
CeDf - 18
RICHIBUCTO BURIAL
SITE MAP
(1981)
N
NORTHWEST
BRANCH
trench 7
trench 6
trench 3
trench 5
trench 2
trench 8
trench 4
trench 9
trench 10
trench 1
SEWAGE PONDS
Datum
0
10
20
30
Metres
X → Potting Activities
Site Limits

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